PRESBYTERY OF CHICAGO MEETING

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As I thought about what I might say this evening, I found myself in a bit of a dilemma. Surely, by now, everything that could be said has been said.

I combed through my file of correspondence – a fat file 3-3/4 inches thick, evenly divided between those who support Amendment A and those who oppose Amendment A. There are some remarkable letters in that file – letters I will treasure as long as I live, and letters that make me ashamed of what has happened to my church.

And so I decided to be confessional and not polemic.

I confess – I don't want to be here tonight. I'd rather be at the symphony or watching the Bulls or reading a book. I'd almost rather be anywhere than here and I'll wager I'm not the only one here who feels like that.

My soul longs for the day when this many Presbyterians will generate this much ecclesiastical energy and passion and anger and indignation – about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or urban ministry, or worldwide mission, or racism, economic justice or children shooting children in the Robert Taylor Homes – we should be meeting to talk about that. My soul longs for this dark night to be over.

I have given most of the past two years to try to find a way for the church I love to negotiate through these times and this issue.

I visited a third of our presbyteries, all our seminaries. I sat down with leaders of contending parties. I offered to go anywhere and talk to anyone about the peace, unity and purity of my church. I traveled to nine countries and talked to our mission workers and our mission partners and everywhere I went I encountered a great sadness – but an even greater hope that somehow we can find a way through that does not destroy unity, a way to be faithful that does not theologically and ecclesiastically disenfranchise nearly one-half of our family and will allow us to refocus our energy on our mission.

Amendment A is, I believe, a way out. It is, I believe, more faithful to Jesus Christ than Amendment B.

It does not address the question of the ordination of homosexual persons. There are outrageous accusations whistling around our church – that Amendment A will allow promiscuity, promote infidelity, condone pedophilia and bestiality. A respected leader calls it Amorality A. Another calls it The Big Lie. A distinguished professor calls its theology corrupt.

I confess that I grieve for my church. I'm beyond anger – on most days. My mother taught me that there are some basic guidelines for keeping a family together. It is essentially having the modesty to know the difference between truth and opinion.

She taught me that there is a big difference between saying,

> "This soup stinks!" and "I don't care for this soup, thank you."

A critical difference between,

> "Your tie is ugly!" and "I don't think that tie flatters you."

A big difference, that is to say, between saying:

> "I disagree with your conclusion," and "Your conclusion has no morality about it; is a lie; is corrupt."

My soul longs for a church that once again sounds like a community of Jesus Christ – and not a mirror reflection of our ideologically contentious culture at its most vulgar.

I support Amendment A because I believe it reflects the mind and will of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Holy Scripture.

I support Amendment A because I believe it is an honest and faithful word in a very difficult time.

I support Amendment A because it reflects the very heart of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition – the humble acknowledgement that people of faith and integrity and courage – can disagree – and still belong to one another.

I support Amendment A because it does not require us to inquire into one another's private, intimate lives, but trusts people and sessions and congregations and Committees on Ministry and presbyteries to make responsible decisions about leadership.

At its most recent meeting, the Session of Fourth Presbyterian Church reaffirmed its support of Amendment A and voted to "strongly urge the Presbytery of Chicago to vote the passage of Amendment A."

The Session reflects the mind and heart, so far as I know it, of my congregation. Nevertheless, Fourth Church is not unanimous. Some members are opposed. Mary are for. Many are still struggling and aren't sure. That is how it should be.

The difference is that Amendment A encourages and celebrates that conversation, that difference of opinion. Amendment B intends to end it. And, as my Mama taught me, that isn't particularly healthy for the family.

One final confession. I was supposed to be in Pittsburgh tonight – addressing Pittsburgh Presbytery on this same topic. I canceled that date – because this is my family. This is my church and even when I don't particularly want to be, I will be here.